

Ames Monument

HABS No. WYO-72

16 miles East of Laramie on Interstate 80,

South at Vedauwoo exit, 2 miles on gravel road

Laramie

Albany County

Wyoming

HABS

WYO,

1-LARAM,

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WYO-72

AMES MONUMENT

Location: Lots 3 and 4, section 6, Township 13 North, Range 71 West, 16 miles east of Laramie, Albany County, Wyoming. Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: (USGS Sherman Mountains Quadrangle Map) 13.466625.4553200.

Present Owner: Union Pacific Railroad.

Present Occupant: None.

Present Use: Monument.

Statement of Significance: The Ames family commissioned this monument to honor the memory of Oakes and Oliver Ames for their role in the building of the Union Pacific Railroad. The structure was designed by architect H. H. Richardson, with medallions by sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. It stood at the highest point on the transcontinental railroad until 1918, when the railroad was moved several miles south.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1880-1882.
2. Architect: H. H. Richardson (1838-1886). Richardson was known for his pragmatic planning and robust masonry forms which were derived from the Romanesque. His work is considered to have been a major influence on the development of American architecture. Richardson had worked for the Ames family on other projects: Ames Memorial Library (1877-79), the Town Hall (1879-81), and the Ames Gate Lodge (1880-81), all in North Easton, Massachusetts. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907) sculpted the nine-foot-high medallions of Oakes and Oliver Ames.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The management of the Union Pacific Railroad had the monument erected on land believed to have been owned by the railroad. However, they were in error, and in 1885 William Murphy purchased the land under the Desert Land Act of 1877, for \$9.75. He planned to sell advertising on the monument. The Union Pacific thwarted this plan by obtaining a special deed for the land in 1889.

and, in 1904, the Union Pacific took out a patent on the land.

4. Alterations and additions: None.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The Ames Monument was erected under the authority of a resolution adopted by the stockholders of the Union Pacific Railroad Company at a meeting held in Boston, Massachusetts on March 10, 1875. The resolution reads:

Resolved, that in memory of Oakes Ames, and in recognition of his services in the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad to which he devoted his means and his best energies with a courage, fidelity, and integrity unsurpassed in the history of railroad construction, the Directors (of this company) are requested to take measures in cooperation with such friends as may desire to contribute, for the erection at some point on the line of the road of a suitable and permanent monument.

The resolution obviously reflects the close relationship of Oakes Ames and the Union Pacific Railroad. It also reflects the public sentiment for Oakes Ames which arose following his censure by the United States House of Representatives in 1873 and his death in the same year.

When Oakes Ames (1804-1873) and his brother, Oliver Ames (1807-1877), took over the family shovel business in North Easton, Massachusetts, they expanded it and took up other business concerns as well. The Ames Brothers were also active in Massachusetts politics. Oliver Ames was elected to the Massachusetts State Senate as a Whig in 1852 and as a Republican in 1857. He soon gave up politics, however, to devote himself to business and became involved in the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. He served for a time as president and director of that company. Oakes Ames, a Republican, became active in politics in 1850 and was elected to the U. S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts in 1862. He was reelected four times and served until his death in 1873.

The necessity of constructing a transcontinental railroad was recognized as early as the 1840s. It was not until 1862, however, that Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act. This Act provided for land grants to two companies--the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific--and a loan of government bonds which were to be a first mortgage and to be transferred after the first forty miles of track had been laid. For two years there was no action and so Congress passed a second Pacific Railway Act in 1864.

This act doubled the land grant and authorized the companies to issue an equal amount of first mortgage bonds having precedence over the others, thus making the second issue of bonds by the government a second mortgage on the road and its franchises. This finally stirred the business community to action.

Financial difficulties arose from a provision in the charter of the Union Pacific which prohibited the sale of stock at less than face value. An investment of \$51 million was necessary in order to purchase the controlling shares in the company, whose stock was valued at \$100 million. The great risk inherent in this undertaking led to the formation, in 1864, of a construction company in which the original stockholders of the Union Pacific Company were able to subscribe in proportion to their interest in the railroad. The construction company became known as the Credit Mobilier of America. T. C. Durant, vice-president of Union Pacific Railroad Company, was named president of the Credit Mobilier. As building costs of the railroad escalated, construction work was halted and Oakes Ames was called upon to save the Credit Mobilier.

Oliver Ames was named president of the Union Pacific, and Oakes Ames took control of the Credit Mobilier. The staggering physical and financial problems involved in the construction of a transcontinental railroad caused Oakes Ames to invest not only his own time and energy, but much of his personal fortune as well. In 1867, in anticipation of congressional regulation of the Credit Mobilier, Ames sold shares of the company stock to other members of Congress. It was Oakes Ames opinion that distribution of the stock among members of Congress, would make them more solicitous of their own property. He set aside 343 shares for this purpose because he could place them "where they will do the most good to us. I am here on the spot and can better judge where they should go."

In 1872, three years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Oakes Ames' unethical methods came to light following a quarrel he had with an associate, Colonel H. S. McComb of Delaware. McComb filed affidavits in a Pennsylvania court, alleging misuse by Ames of Credit Mobilier stock. Letters written by Ames at the time the stock was distributed were published in their entirety by the New York Sun on September 4, 1872, under the heading "The King of Frauds: How the Credit Mobilier Bought Its Way into Congress." Congressmen who had become involved as stockholders in Credit Mobilier sought to dissociate themselves from Oakes Ames. Two Congressional committees were formed to investigate McComb's allegations. Luke P. Poland of Vermont was chairman of the Committee which formally reported that Ames was "guilty of selling to

members of Congress shares of stock in the Credit Mobilier of America for prices much below the true value of such stock with intent thereby to influence the votes and decisions of such members in matters to be brought before Congress for action." Poland's committee recommended that Ames be expelled from the House of Representatives.

Ames conducted his own defense before Congress in 1873, justifying his actions in the following words:

These, then, are my offenses: that I have risked reputation, fortune, everything, in an enterprise of incalculable benefit to the government, from which the capital of the world shrank; that I have sought to strengthen the work thus rashly undertaken by invoking the charitable judgment of the public upon its obstacles and embarrassments; that I have had friends, some of them in official life, with whom I have been willing to share advantageous opportunities of investments; that I have kept to the truth, through good and evil report, denying nothing, concealing nothing, reserving nothing. Who will say that I alone am to be offered up a sacrifice to appease a public clamor, or expiate the sins of others? Not until such an offering is made will I believe it possible. But if this body shall so order that it can best be purified by the choice of a single victim, I shall accept its mandate, appealing, with unfaltering confidence, to the impartial verdict of history for that vindication which it is proposed to deny me here.

A second Congressional Committee led by Jeremiah M. Wilson of Indiana, reported that the Credit Mobilier had defrauded the government. Ames maintained that there had been a return of \$10 million on expenditures amounting to \$70 million. However, modern historian John P. Davis estimates in his The Union Pacific Railway that profits were in excess of \$20 million over a four-year period.

The House eventually dropped proceedings to expell Oakes Ames and instead condemned his conduct in a resolution which stated:

Resolved, That the House absolutely condemns the conduct of Oakes Ames, a member of this House from Massachusetts, in seeking to procure congressional attention to the affairs of a corporation in which he was interested, and whose interest directly depended upon the legislation of Congress, by including members of Congress to invest in the stocks of said corporation.

Oakes Ames died ten weeks after the Congressional Condemnation on May 8, 1873. Oliver Ames was able to bring order out of the near

bankruptcy of the family firm, Oliver Ames and Sons. He was recognized as a financier, railroad magnate, and philanthropist. Oliver Ames died in 1877.

In 1883 the Massachusetts legislature adopted a resolution expressing its gratitude to Oakes Ames for his work, exonerating him by an expression of its faith in the integrity of his purpose and character.

Ames Monument was constructed by 85 skilled and semi-skilled laborers at a cost of \$65,000. It is an important architectural structure which links the Ames brothers with the history of American transportation.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Henry Russel Hitchcock, The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times (Anchor Books: Hamden, Connecticut, 1961), Plate 56.
2. Bibliography:
 - a. Primary and unpublished sources:

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 - b. Secondary and published sources:

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Prepared by Candace Reed
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
December, 1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This large pyramidal monument was designed by H. H. Richardson, the Boston architect who, with Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, shaped the course of modern American architecture. The monument designates the highest point on the original run of the first transcontinental railroad and commemorates efforts of the Ames Brothers of Massachusetts in behalf of the Union Pacific Railroad to build a transcontinental railroad.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The structure is a four sided pyramid, sixty feet square at the base and sixty feet high.
2. Foundations: Locally quarried red granite.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Locally quarried, rough hewn red, grey and black granite laid up in random ashlar.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing walls.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Crawl space on the southwest side gives access to the interior space. A local recollection suggests that at one time there was a more definite entrance way, but it has been closed with matching red granite blocks.
 - b. Windows: None.
6. Shape: At the base of this monument the ashlar blocks are 5' x 8'. The slope up is in the ratio of four inches to the foot. At a point twenty-seven feet above the ground there is a setback. From this point the coursing is evenly horizontal and rises twenty-six feet to a second setback. Within the last seven feet the four sides of the pyramid come to a point at the capstone.
7. Decorative detail: There is incised lettering on the north-west face which reads: "In Memory of Oakes and Oliver Ames." Two medallions, nine feet high and 39 feet from the base of the monument, one on the east face and one on the west face, show the profiles of Oakes and Oliver Ames, respectively. These bas-relief medallions were chiseled from granite quarried in Quincy, Massachusetts, by the American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

C. Description of Interior: Interior is not accessible. While it cannot be verified, local information suggests that the interior is hollow, with a wooden structure supporting (in part) the sloping sides.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The monument is located

sixteen miles southeast of Laramie, Wyoming, at a site which originally was the highest point on the route of the Union Pacific Railroad. The railroad was subsequently routed a few miles south. The monument is located on a high barren plain where only short grass grows. In a nearby area, Vedauwoo, a few miles to the north, there are unusual rock formations which stand sentient like the Ames Monument. The town of Sherman, Wyoming, was once located a few hundred yards from the monument and north of the railroad tracks. Nothing remains of the town.

The face with lettering is oriented 30 degrees west of north.

Prepared by J. William Rudd, Architect
Project Supervisor
National Park Service
Summer, 1973
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Architectural Historian
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.
Fall, 1977

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1973 Wyoming Project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Wyoming Recreation Commission.

This project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was Professor J. William Rudd, Architect, of the University of Cincinnati. Project Historian was John Paige, Oklahoma State University. The measured drawings were prepared by John Uhlir, University of California at Berkeley, Architect; and Student Assistant Architects Richard Duflocq, University of Cincinnati, Clayton Fraser, University of Tennessee, and Richard Wyatt, California Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo. Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.

ADDENDUM TO:
AMES MONUMENT
Interstate 88
Laramie
Albany County
Wyoming

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